



CASA of Arizona

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CASA of Arizona mourns child welfare advocate, Kirk Grugel-Short

Phoenix, AZ – October 28, 2021 – Everyone who knew Kirk Grugel-Short would agree that he was persistent in his efforts to ensure children had what they needed to succeed in life. It is with great sadness that we announce Kirk Grugel-Short passed away on September 6, 2021 at his home in Tucson, Arizona alongside his beloved husband, Jim. “Kirk lived a life of purpose, and love,” said longtime friend Kate Dobler.

Kirk was originally born in California and made Show Low, Arizona his home for most of his adult life. Upon retirement from CASA of Navajo County, he moved to Tucson, Arizona with his husband. His love for travel, cooking, and baking, as well as always being sharply dressed go hand-in-hand when talking of Kirk. In his already busy life, he never rested when it came to advocating for children who experienced abuse and/or neglect.



The list of Kirk’s advocacy efforts and the positive impact he made in the lives of children and families across Arizona will never be forgotten:

- 2004-2014 – Director of CASA of Navajo County where he recruited CASA volunteers who advocate for children in the foster care system and act as the eyes and ears to the judge.
- Assisted in founding the Navajo County Drug Coalition.
- 2014 – Kirk started volunteering as a Pima County Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) member where he served for the remainder of his life.
- Kirk sat on multiple boards throughout his career which invested in the healthy development and learning of young children:
 - Navajo/Apache Regional Partnership Council with First Things First
 - Pima North Partnership Council with First Things First
 - Citizens Review Panel Board member

- As a persistent advocate for children, Kirk initiated a children's book donation project when he noticed there was nothing geared towards children in the juvenile court waiting area. He also worked to set up a small children's play area. Kirk used his own funds to place an alphabet/number rug in each area along with a bookshelf filled with children's books. He continued to donate books, accepted donations, and worked with organizations such as Make Way for Books to ensure the bookshelves remained stocked.
- In 2018, Ben's Bells Project recognized Kirk for inspiring kindness daily and making the community a better place to live. His endless kindness was celebrated by being "belled" by the organization.

Kirk was well known and respected throughout Arizona's child welfare community. He crossed the paths of many and left lasting impressions.

Kate Dobler, former Navajo/Apache Regional Partnership Council with First Things First Regional Director, ally and friend:

"There are people in this life who mark your journey, and serve as guideposts. They are intensely giving, and want nothing in return. Kirk became my biggest champion, my staunchest supporter, and I think his heart grew about 10-sizes bigger. (Upon retirement) he never left the work, never left the joy and responsibility of building this system to get all kids to grow up healthy, safe, and ready to flourish in life. Kirk was, and continues to be, a force for good. I see his face, hear his words, and feel his presence."

Caroline Lauth-Owens, Dependent Children's Services Director, Arizona Supreme Court:

"In some ways, Kirk was larger than life. His relentless passion to help children in need directed his life's mission. Kirk held himself accountable in every role he served and reminded others of their responsibility towards those children and families who came before us. Kirk had a wonderful way with words and an infectious laugh. Kirk will be greatly missed."

Alysia Heward, CASA of Navajo County Coordinator and Kirk's former CASA Support Staff:

"One of my favorite things about him was that (while he could never pronounce my name right) he would introduce me and say, 'She's my right arm and half of my left.' Which always made me feel appreciated. He was an amazing public relations expert and created connections for the CASA program that are still intact. He was a wonderful cook and had a generous spirit."

Jacqueline Herrera, Foster Care Review Board Program Specialist:

"He was very passionate about his community and had a specific vested interest in Make Way for Books. Kirk had strong leadership qualities, was very tactful, wasn't afraid to ask difficult questions and he gave praise where praise was due. And more than anything, it was very evident that Kirk's top priority and the center of his universe was his husband, Jim. He spoke about Jim often, and with such pride and affection. They seemed like a perfect match for each other and enjoyed the same things and complemented each other very well."

Pam Burke, CASA of Pinal County Coordinator:

“Great guy, awesome advocate and terrific friend. This is how I would describe my friendship with Kirk. I met him through our work as Coordinators for the CASA Program in our respective counties. We were instant friends. Kirk had a great sense of humor, creative spirit and was a strong supporter of foster children in AZ and the CASA Program. I believe my life has been enriched by having Kirk as my friend. I miss him.”

Kirk Grugel-Short will be remembered forever for his genuine commitment and tireless voice for children through all walks of life.

If Kirk’s story has impacted you, consider volunteering to make a difference in in the lives of children in your community. Below are several of the organizations in which Kirk was involved:

- CASA of Arizona
 - www.CASAofArizona.org
 - 602-452-3683
- Foster Care Review Board (Statewide Boards)
 - www.azcourts.gov/FCRB
 - 602-452-3400
- First Things First
 - Apache/Navajo
 - www.firstthingsfirst.org/regions/navajo-apache/
 - 928-532-5041
 - Pima North
 - www.firstthingsfirst.org/regions/pima-north/
 - 520-628-6650
- Make Way for Books
 - www.makewayforbooks.org
 - 520-398-6451
- Ben’s Bells
 - www.bensbells.org